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Misunderstood Mexico

BEAUTIFUL, wonderful old Mexico, our nearest foreign mission field, which is separated from the United States by nothing but an imaginary line 2,000 miles long, the Rio Grande, *and prejudice.* A fascinating country and people under our very noses, but as little known and understood by the average American as is the country of the Grand Lama (Tibet). Do you realize that Mexicans are Americans like ourselves and North Americans at that?

In order properly to understand Mexico one must more than cross the imaginary line or the river. Your prejudice will take to its legs when you get into the heart of Mexico and the soul of the Mexican people. But you must go farther than Tia Juana or New Laredo, Nogales or Ciudad Juarez, to see the real Mexico or the real Mexican. There are too many long American race courses, too much bad United States whisky, too numerous terrible gambling holes and other dens of iniquity, too many vices and too few virtues in the border towns to see Mexico or Mexicans at their best.

Mexico is a huge everything in physical and general characteristics. All kinds of climate, all kinds of products, all kinds of scenery, and all kinds of people. These varieties depend upon latitude, longitude and altitude. Chilpancingo and Chihuahua are as different as El Paso and New York. A Guerrero Indian and a Mexican City gentleman are as much alike as a Bostonian and a Texan cowboy. The Yucatecos and Tabasqueñians are a species by themselves just as native Californians and Yankees are different. We must not generalize in regard to Mexico from too few particulars.

Any one who understands the land and the people at all must confess that Mexico has been crushed, oppressed and miserably treated since the days of Cortez. Spain, France and the United States of America have each given her a whack in his own brutal way and for his own ungodly gains. Soldiers of fortune of many nations have gone to Mexico to exploit her for their own selfish ends, taking all they could get, and giving, or leaving, little in return. They have not even left an impress of good manners or good morals or pleasant memories.

Not long ago, Mexico was nearly as large as the United States. Little by little (the Mexicans say *poco a poco*) slices have been carved off. California and Texas, Colorado and Utah, Nevada and Oklahoma, New Mexico and Arizona and once upon a time, quite a chunk of Wyoming and Kansas belonged to Mexico. How very strange that Mexico should be at all suspicious when the United States troops crossed the border, though Washington tried to make it very clear that the expedition was merely to run down a bandit who had invaded United States territory. Dollars and soldiers by the thousand per day are spent to hunt for a little needle in a great big Mexican hay stack. "Villa dead or alive" was the slogan! Our small missionary army, feeble as we are in Mexico, could eliminate every bandit in a decade on half the expenditure of money and men, and we could take all the bandits alive too.

CONVERTED OR KILLED

How much better it would be to see Villa "converted" than killed. If it is necessary to hunt him down we hope and pray that United States authorities may act like Christians.

But what a waste of good money it seems to use it in killing men. There is such

a great need for schools of all kinds, primary, high, industrial, agricultural, for Mexico. We need medical missionaries and all other kinds, hospitals, nurses. Hardly a cent is going Mexico-ward for any of these things while thousands of dollars pour over to bring poor, ignorant Villa to a murderer's end.

Villa is typical of our heathenish neglect of the Mexican people. A friend of Villa gave an incident of him not long ago in Palo Alto. A Mexican mother out in the mountains of Villa's country was trying to hush her hungry baby to sleep. The child was fretting and crying until the mother could endure no longer when she said, "Hush little one, cry no longer. Don Pancho will soon come and bring bread to his children." What a power such a bandit might be, with that tender heart and with his unquestionable leadership if only he as a little child had heard the Saviour's "Suffer the little children to come unto me," or if he himself had been led in the Way Everlasting.

Villa's mountains have been where they are ever since the United States began to exist. Villa has roamed over those mountain tops ever since he was born, but like most of Mexico's mountain tops, there are no schools there, no teachers, no one to point out the Way, the Truth, and the Life. More hopeless still, no one seems particularly anxious to handle the Mexican situation in that way.

Once upon a time there was a wise philanthropist who in times of famine would vote for nothing but a supply of toothpicks. Are not our efforts in behalf of Mexico somewhat of the toothpick variety? Do we remember that we are in the best sense Mexico's keeper? Do we feel that it is a waste of time to help our nearest neighbor? Is our faith in Mexico and her oppressed masses so strong that it is contagious, or is it weak and ineffective? Do we believe that all men, even Mexican peons, were created free and equal? Or do we in unholy self-conceit think our own dear baby worth six of Mexico's less favored little ones but still precious in His sight?

However we may feel, or even if we don't feel at all, the Mexican situation has come to such a pass that we must face it. Not much longer can we sit on the fence and wonder who is trying to be President of Mexico this morning. The Mexican Peril affects the United States more than the Yellow Peril ever has or will affect us. The Rio Grande is narrower than the Pacific Ocean and imaginary lines and prejudices are slim barriers of defense. Mexico is smashing crockery and committing crime at our back doors and we can not, in self defense, if for no more noble motive, ignore her disturbing performances any longer. As a nation we must have peace in Mexico that we may have it within our own gates.

WHAT SHALL WE DO?

Now what is the Church in the United States going to do about it? The Government may send soldiers to Mexico till doomsday and smooth matters over on the outside by mere force but the inner state of Mexico will be as bad as ever. How quickly we would resent it, if England or France or Germany were to send even missionaries to Mexico. It would be almost as objectionable as sending battleships and soldiers. Why! there is a Monroe Doctrine at Washington! Mexico is a Christian nation, nominally, at least, and is the special protégé of the United States. Meantime we sit, Christians that we are, like dogs in a manger, while Mexico is perishing for what we could give her with hardly any sacrifice.

Mexico's saints and idols are being shattered and who will fill those vacant niches with better things if the Christian people of the United States do not supply their places?

Listen to this statement from one of the missionaries now on the field:

"Last week the great aristocratic church of Merida was swept clean of its idols and turned over to the Students' League of Yucatan for its assembly room. A certain Mexican whose hands were still covered with the dust of the idols he had been helping to smash said to a friend of mine, 'We saved a few images which we are going to take to the public schools and standing them up before the children say, 'There you see what a saint looks like and now you see how he can be destroyed.' Then with a hammer the image will be pounded to pieces before the eyes of the children.' "

We can not be responsible now for either the worship or the desecration. It is

too late. But we can and will be responsible to God for Mexico if we put nothing in place of those smashed images.

Gen. Carranza is bitterly opposed to the Roman Catholic Church which has held sway in his country for three centuries. We do not approve of bitterness in anything, least of all in religion, but it is *his* country, *his* church, *his* people, all of which he understands and knows through and through, far better than we can ever hope to know them. Whatever mistakes Carranza is making, he shows most excellent judgment in his choice of men for prominent political positions. A number of these men are Protestants, not in name only, but are leading earnest, active, Christian lives. True democracy and Protestant Christianity go hand in hand. Carranza is working for a democracy and Mexico is bound to have Protestant Christianity when she becomes a true democracy. The present minister of education in Mexico (Prof. Andrés Osuna) was educated for a Methodist minister. In all Mexico the Carranza Government could hardly have found a better man or a more capable one to grapple with Mexico's educational problems.

The Superintendent of Schools of the State of Guanajuato is a graduate of the Presbyterian Theological Seminary at Coyoacan and later of Washington and Jefferson College, Pennsylvania. English has been substituted for French in the schools of Guanajuato. When Mexico and the United States speak a common language there may be fewer misunderstandings.

Another Presbyterian is at the head of the technical schools. Another has gone about the country explaining to the people the propaganda of the Carranzistas or "Constitutionalists" as they call themselves. A Protestant is Superintendent of the Hidalgo State Schools. Another is on Carranza's staff, and many others are in positions of influence.

Carranza's Minister of Finance is a Roman Catholic but a very liberal one. His home is across the street from the Presbyterian San Angel Girls' School. He is a broad-minded, well-educated man. He is a lawyer and has read the Bible, and has traveled. Carranza chose well his financial as well as his educational minister.

Here is a translation of a letter which Carranza's minister wrote to a Protestant friend in appreciation of a Bible which the friend had given him:

Vera Cruz, March 23, 1916

My Esteemed Friend:

I am not going to acknowledge your fine regard, shown by the personal gift of a Bible, with a verbal expression of my appreciation; and so I am going to express myself in writing. The Bible is the book of all the ages, of all nations and all men and no literary education can be conceived which does not put the Bible at the very foundation of the classic studies as one of the chief works of reference and inspiration.

In my opinion even in the life of a civilian or soldier, most exposed to vicissitudes during this revolutionary epoch, the Bible should be one of the books never wanting in his equipage.

In my private library I have a great variety of copies of this Book and especially an edition of Rodriques de San Miguel with a Latin-Spanish text in parallel columns. This perhaps is the edition I have most frequently read. In the actual circumstances in which I find myself I don't wish so large an edition and I would have been satisfied with quite a cheap copy.

The one you have had the kindness to send me is highly appreciated, not only on account of the book itself but owing especially to the circumstance—that it is the best edition of a small size. This fact guarantees its being kept at hand among the very few books for constant use.

Please allow me to reiterate to you my gratitude and express my constant esteem as

Your affectionate friend and your most attentive servant,

Signed . . . . . .

There are scores of Protestants who are serving their country in various capacities, and General Carranza certainly knows a good man when he sees him, be he Catholic or Protestant. It seems as if President Carranza *must* come out right when he has so many good men back of him.

In the meantime Mexico's people are starving. They are in somewhat the same plight as the people of the United States were after the Civil War before the Reconstruction Period set in. Mexico's masses in prosperous times have not a great abundance and at the close of five years of continuous revolution their case is pitiful. We often wonder if as many people have actually *starved* to death in Europe as in Mexico during these horrible days. Last August in Mexico City corpses of women who had starved to death were being carried through the streets. One of our students counted twelve in one procession. Women with dead babies in their arms went about looking for a place to throw away their little starved bodies. Better class women who had some money could not buy food because there was none to buy. Five hundred were reported as dying daily in the Capital alone.

The money question also is in a terrible state. Exchange at last reports was 70 to 1, that is one dollar of United States currency brought in Seventy Mexican dollars. We sent over $265 last fall and it brought 4,000 pesos. Those 4,000 pesos outrivaled the Zarephath widow's cruise of oil. One hundred pesos kept seventy babies alive for five days. Another 100 aided 68 people. Some was used to help typhus victims (there have been 30,000 cases of typhus in Mexico City at one time). Fifty pesos set one poor widow up in business so that she could keep her children from starvation. A sick woman was sent to the hospital, a boy clothed sufficiently to enable him to hunt and get work. We have all had to make a dollar do the work of two at one time or another in our career, but never did $265 swell to such enormous proportions. If Mexico had received one-half of what had been sent to Belgium, or to the Jews of Europe or to the Armenians, she would be fed for years to come, for if any human being can subsist on next to nothing, that being lives in Mexico.

AS TO MEXICO'S FUTURE

Let us bury deep the dead past and cheer up. We can not *undo* what we have done, much less can we undo what we have *not* done for these near and needy ones. Charity may begin at home, but it should not stay there. The Cincinnati Conference of missionary leaders in 1914, filled Mexico missionaries with fresh hope, new courage, unbounded enthusiasm and genuine inspiration. This conference changed the whole Mexican missionary map for all churches that did not refuse to co-operate. At Stanford University, Mary Antin defined co-operation as "working with the other fellow without squabbling." We have agreed to co-operate in Mexico (having done our squabbling beforehand). The world is growing too small for any church or individual to plod along alone much longer. To quote a fine-spirited California rector, his Church's day of solitary co-operation is about over. He said, "If our Church doesn't soon come to its senses on co-operation, something is going to happen." He did not say what, only looked fierce, as if it might be a "squabble!" The Panama Congress in April took a stride forward on co-operation.

Mexico's troubles and trials seem almost more than we can bear. Her woes and sorrows are almost too heavy a burden. May Mexico soon have peace and may the evangelical Christian forces work together to establish righteousness and knowledge, love and a high plane of living throughout the land.

(Mrs. Wm.) MARY McOUAT WALLACE.

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